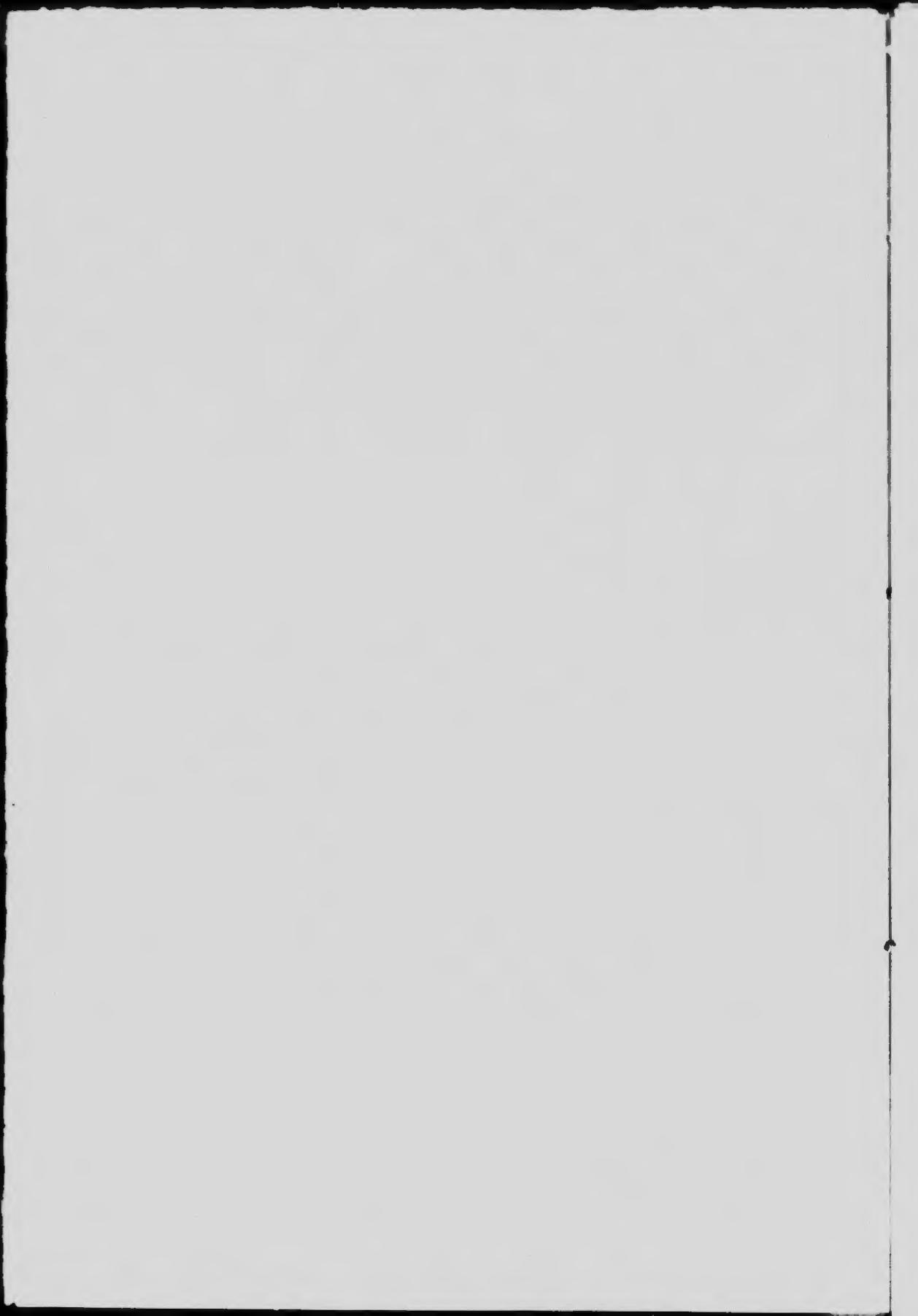


The Secular Press and Foreign Missions

62-2010





THE SECULAR PRESS
AND FOREIGN MISSIONS

THE SECULAR PRESS AND FOREIGN MISSIONS

BY
J. A. MACDONALD
MANAGING EDITOR OF THE GLOBE
TORONTO, CANADA

*Authorized
Edition*

THE UNIVERSITY PRESS OF
SEWANEE TENNESSEE

BV2070

M3

FOREWORD

THE decision of The University Press to put into attractive printed form an address prepared for a special occasion and delivered under somewhat unusual conditions makes a word of preface convenient, if not necessary.

This address on *The Secular Press and Foreign Missions* was delivered, as the official report says, "at Nashville, Tennessee, Friday, March 2, 1906, before 3,350 students and professors, representing 700 institutions of higher learning in the United States and Canada, the occasion being the Fifth International Convention of the Student Volunteer Movement for Foreign Missions."

It has for so long been the habit, in certain circles of the academic and religious elect, to look loftily on the Press, and to regard the daily newspaper as akin to the plagues of Egypt in noisomeness and virulence, that the request to a newspaper man to present the newspaper point of view before a convention of delegates from the chief universities and colleges of this continent was sufficiently surprising to carry with it the obligation of acceptance. The interest in the incident was not diminished by the fact that the convention was religious in its spirit and missionary in its motive.

It is the more gratifying to find a demand for the

FOREWORD

publication of this address in more permanent form because what is here presented as the point of view of a newspaper man is, in my judgment, a fair statement of the attitude of the best and most forceful men on the secular Press in the United States and Canada today. Newspaper men are neither bohemians nor philistines, and as the Press comes to its own, delivered from the thraldom of political partisanship on the one hand and lifted above the braggart presence of a race-proud and young-blood jingoism on the other, the newspaper will more and more become the vital instrument for the education and direction of public opinion in all those matters and movements which make for the betterment of society and the greatness of life.

The truly great daily newspaper is in touch with all sides of life from sports to religion. Yellow journalism is not great. It requires neither the best brains nor the finest skill, but only money and a distempered mind.

And it is well for the best interests in both individual and national life that the Press be held true to its highest ethical ideals and made responsive to the social motive. At this moment, both in the United States and Canada, the honest and courageous public journal is the chief safeguard of the rights and liberties of the people. Congress and Parliament may be corrupted, and may join hands with the enemies of public interests and national honor, but the cause

FOR E W O R D

7

is not lost, and the chances for reform and revival are good, so long as the Press is unpurchased, sound-hearted and strong.

It is true that the Press has its well defined limitations. Perhaps the best it can do for education, religion, and social reform is to clear the way and to create an atmosphere for the leaders to whom has come the Vision and the Whisper and the Power. So much as that the newspaper may do and, as it seems to me, it is its duty deliberately and intelligently to undertake.

To present that as the point of view of a newspaper man in reference to the problem of world-wide evangelization, and to establish a community of interest and of feeling between the leaders of the missionary movement and the men on the Press, is the motive and purpose of this address on *The Secular Press and Foreign Missions*.

J. A. MACDONALD.

The Globe, Toronto,
April 19, 1906.

THE SECULAR PRESS AND FOREIGN MISSIONS

WHAT should be the relation of the secular Press to the work of Christian missions in non-Christian lands? I am asked to answer that question, not as an Ambassador of State who deals with high politics among the nations; not as a missionary official at home or as a missionary worker abroad; and not as a student volunteer in whose heart the passion for service burns with undimmed ardor. None of these qualifications or distinctions is mine. The only apology for my place on the programme and my presence on the platform is that I am the managing editor of a daily newspaper. And so the opportunity comes again for some one to ask, "Is Saul also among the prophets?"

As a man's point of view is a factor in his opinions and judgments, it is right that I should not conceal the standpoint from which I am to view this question. I am a newspaper man, with the bias, the limitations, the instincts and the traditions of my craft. For the moment I am not specially concerned with the religious interests at home or the missionary activities abroad. My perspective, my ambitions, my ideals are those of the newspaper office.

Now for our question. Here we have the secular Press, sending its line into all the earth, making its

voice heard from Florida to the Yukon, the teacher of the public mind, the organ of public opinion, the university of the common people. Now, what is the relation of that institution to the foreign missionary movement?

I answer that question, as is a Scotsman's right, by asking another, and, being a Canadian Scot, I ask two: First, What is the function of the Press? and, second, What is the newspaper value of missionary incidents and missionary movements?

I. The function of the newspaper is, in a word, to be what it professes to be—a news paper. Its primary function is the collecting, the organizing, the interpreting and the disseminating of news. The daily newspaper presents a report of the world's doings for one day. It holds the mirror up to life, and reflects the facts of life with more or less definiteness of outline and truth of proportion. All sorts of facts are reflected because all sorts of facts are there. Quarrel with the facts of life—with its murder, and theft, and bribery, and divorce, and graft, and perjury, and multiform immorality—quarrel with the facts before you quarrel with their reflection. Change those facts into things of beauty and their reflection in the daily newspaper will be a joy forever.

The proportion and the perspective of the newspaper, the space given to this class of news and to that, the sweep of its survey and the interpretation of its facts, will depend on the resources of its count-

AND FOREIGN MISSIONS

11

ing-room, the needs of its constituency and the quality of its ideal.

The typical up-to-date newspaper has its eyes on the ends of the earth. Not only the social function in the next street, but to-night's happenings in politics, in trade, in international affairs, whether they be in Britain, or continental Europe, or Africa, or the Orient, will be told in the morning to the people of the United States and Canada. The Press has its finger-tips on the pulse of the world, and the heart-beats of civilization are counted and the health of the world bulletined in the office of the daily newspaper.

II. Now, in that world-survey should a place be made for news and views of the world's evangelization? A place is made for world-wide politics, and trade, and social scandal, and industrial revolutions, and wars and rumors of wars. Of all these the Associated Press tells the story, and special cables supply the "scoops." A "scoop," or a "beat," in diplomacy, or in foreign politics, or in international intrigue is a front-page feature for a wide-awake newspaper. Of what value is a "scoop" in foreign missions?

I answer that question, not as a missionary or a missionary advocate, but solely as the editor-in-chief of a daily newspaper, and I say that in my judgment the work of Christian missions in non-Christian lands contains, and could be made to supply, as important news, and often as sensational a story, as is ever carried by the cables or told by the Press.

What gives public interest and sensation to any news item from a foreign land? It is its broadly human features, its intimacy of touch with thought and life at home, and its bearing on the fortunes of civilization abroad. And those characteristics belong to incidents and movements in foreign missions just as truly and quite as largely as to news that originates in the secret places of the diplomats, or at the Legations, or in the Foreign Office, or among the traders or capitalists or social nabobs.

(1) I have said that a foreign news item to be interesting must have broadly human features. Every editor knows the newspaper value of the human element in a story. A thing might happen in Nashville to-night, the parties involved might be obscure and hitherto unheard-of, but in the incident there might be condensed and concentrated some of the master passions, some of the universal elements of human nature, and that story would be flashed to New York, to Chicago, to San Francisco, to Toronto, and would be read with intensest interest to-morrow morning by a million people who never saw Nashville or heard of those involved in the story. The human element makes appeal to the human heart and furnishes the essentials of a newspaper story.

So, too, with incidents and movements in China, in India, in Japan, in Africa, and in all the fields of foreign mission enterprise. In every one of those fields new illustrations are supplied of the great forces

and features in human life — the high courage, the heroic endurance, the significant triumph, the spiritual tragedy. What is needed is the reporter with the true newspaper instinct, and the happenings of the mission field would be woven into a newspaper story. And the day is coming when the genius of the fiction writer will discover and utilize the wealth of material provided in the conflict of Christianity with heathenism. What Ralph Connor has done for the lumber camps of the Ottawa, the ranches of the Foothills and the mining towns of the Rockies some one will yet do for the mission fields of Africa and the Orient. And if meanwhile we newspaper editors in America, in the rush and strain of our crowded lives, are slow to recognize the newspaper value of foreign mission incidents, we can comfort ourselves with the reflection that the great publishing houses of the United States declined Ralph Connor's first book because of its religious and missionary qualities; and you friends of missions may be encouraged to hope for our enlightenment and conversion when you reflect that "Black Rock," although refused at first, has been published by nearly every respectable pirate house in the United States in successive editions ranging from 50,000 to half a million each. Book publishers as well as newspaper editors come to learn that the great human heart is incurably interested in the age-long and world-wide human struggle.

(2) I have also said that the news of foreign mis-

sions is in intimate touch with life at home, and, therefore, has real journalistic value. Foreign affairs — trade, politics, sports — are of newspaper value in proportion to the local interest. The recent general elections in Britain were of interest to hundreds of thousands in the United States and Canada who came from Britain, or who, for commercial reasons, were concerned in matters of tariff and trade. For that reason the cables were kept hot with reports of the speeches and of the voting. Is there not interest as widespread and as keen throughout this country in the incidents and progress of world-wide evangelization? Are there not hundreds of thousands throughout the south and the north and the west and the Dominion of Canada who have children or relatives engaged in the schools and hospitals and evangelistic work of foreign missions? And are there not literally millions who give of their means and who intercede in their prayers for the sake of that missionary work? Those facts are indisputable evidence of a widespread and enduring interest which the secular Press cannot afford to minimize or neglect.

(3) Once more, I have said that the newspaper interest of a foreign news item is in part dependent on its bearing on the progress of civilization abroad. The newspaper is an institution of civilization. It owes to civilization its existence, its freedom, and its power. And it is under obligation to promote civilization, to

strengthen its aggressive agencies and to defend its world-wide interests.

That obligation to civilization involves an obligation to missions. The civilization which we know and approve, under which we live, and to which we owe what is most worth while in our life, is a Christian civilization, awakened, organized, developed, vitalized and kept from corruption and collapse, not by Congress or Parliament, not by trade and industry, not by great corporations and financial institutions, but, more than by all other influences, by the rejuvenating, inspiring, cleansing forces and agencies of the Christian faith. And until we have seen somewhere in actual life a civilization that can live, and that deserves to live, apart from and independent of a vital Christian faith we are bound, when we send across the seas our trade and our scientific knowledge and our political influence, to send also those spiritual and Christian elements which have safeguarded and vitalized our civilization at home.

III. What can the secular Press do, what can reasonably be expected of it, in relation to the world-wide missionary movement?

(1) It can master the missionary problem as thoroughly as it masters the political problem, or the social problem, or the industrial problem, or any other problem that touches the life and progress of a foreign people. On the staff of every newspaper that can afford an expert in finance and trade and econo-

ics and sports there should be an expert in matters of religious and missionary interest, who would save the paper from the mistakes and misrepresentations and interpretations which would not be tolerated in any other department.

(2) It should report the facts of the missionary movement, its organizations at home and its enterprises abroad, with the same intelligence and fairness as is done in the case of other matters and movements. A newspaper that would confuse the terminology of sports or misuse the nomenclature of the law courts or of politics would betray ignorance and suffer disgrace. Its ignorance is as real and its disgrace should be as certain when its reports and comments on religious affairs are confused and misleading.

(3) It should stand for that type of civilization at home which can justly claim the right to extend itself abroad and project itself over the world. Only that civilization which is superior and living is worth transplanting and has the right to endure. There are features in our life, types in our civilization — political, commercial, industrial, social — which are local, selfish, blameworthy, and which would be a burden and a curse to any nation that adopted them. By standing against those types and features, by resisting them, by having them repudiated as being alien and antagonistic to the civilization of America, the Press of this country would not only check the forces that make for corruption and decay at home, but

would present to nations abroad a type of civilization that deserves to be supreme, that has in it the elements that endure, and that is destined to touch to finer issues the life of the world.

(4) The secular Press can aid the missionary cause by standing for honor and truth and a square deal in the relations of Christian nations with the nations and peoples and tribes of the non-Christian world. The British nation is the greatest secular power making for righteousness and civilization which a thousand years of history knows, but the records of British diplomacy, of British trade, of British expansion, in India, in China, in Africa, are not unstained, else we had no mutiny, no enforced opium trade, and no Jameson raids, with the horror and shame and unspeakable dishonor that followed in their train. Look you to your affairs, you men of the American Republic, and see if there be in your diplomacy and foreign trade and new-born, far-flying imperialism anything of which your citizens, did they but know it, ought to be ashamed. By standing against those wrongs the Press of this country would give Christian nations prestige abroad, would promote the civilization and elevate the life of non-Christian peoples, and would give the missionary an undishonored standing and a fair chance.

(5) The Press can still further and more definitely serve the missionary movement by being intelligent and fair in its treatment of the missionary problem,

informed in its discussion of missionary methods, accurate in its estimate of missionary results, and just in its criticisms of missionary workers. No immunity is asked, no exemption from criticism, but only intelligence, fairness, and a just appreciation of the services to the world's knowledge and progress which the missionaries have rendered. There is demanded, too, an honest and reasonable sense of the civil rights of missionaries under the same treaties which secure the rights of traders and travellers. And it is within the scope of the Press not only to criticize missionaries, but also to criticize the uninformed and prejudiced critics of missionaries, the vagabond globe-trotters whose lust has cursed the natives and whose perfidy the missionaries condemn.

(6) Once more, the Press can serve the causes of civilization and evangelization by reading the movements of history and interpreting the developments of human society so as to allow for those spiritual forces without which civilization had not been, and apart from which there could even now be no enduring progress. The men who report and record the doings of the day must co-ordinate those incidents and events into movements, and must relate those movements to the increasing purpose that runs through the ages and gives meaning and worth to the history of the world. Sending cotton from the American south and wheat from the Canadian west, and bringing back rice and tea and silk from the Ori-

ent, is not all there is in the relations of the East and the West. It is not by accident that at the very time when the East is awakening to a new and deep sense of need there is going on in the West a reconceiving and reforming of Christian truth for universal ends, and a reorganizing of Christian forces for world-wide service. These coincidences do not come by chance. The men who stand alert and aware upon the watch-towers and scan the far horizon line, noting the day's happenings in the world's trade and politics and social life, are not blind to the deep significance of the situation in China, and India, and Africa, and the islands of the sea, where the doors of opportunity stand open wide, and a million tongues cry aloud and a million hands are stretched out for the help of a larger, fuller life; nor are they blind to the equally deep significance of the missionary movement which has gathered such force in the churches, and colleges, and universities of this continent and of Christendom, of which this Convention of Student Volunteers is such emphatic expression; nor are they, the best men on the secular Press, unbelieving as to the mighty, all-embracing purpose that runs through the currents and confusions of both East and West, making slowly and by wide circuits, but steadily and surely, for the day-dawn of universal peace and truth and good-will.

The missionary motive is the dynamic of civilization. The Cross of Christ is the philosophy of the

world's history. The Christian evangel is the soul of the world's hope. And the impulse of the world's progress is in the redemptive purpose of God —

That God, which ever lives and loves,
One God, one law, one element,
And one far-off divine event
To which the whole creation moves.

